## Extend permissions to buy time during downturn

The recession has hit the property sector particularly hard. Local authorities are already reporting falls in applications that are significant enough to merit laying off staff (*Planning*, 16 January, p10).

If the development industry is to hit the ground running as it emerges from the downturn it will need two primary elements — market confidence and planning permission. Two straightforward measures could be introduced into the system that would play a valuable part in recovery.

The first is to encourage local authorities to grant longer permissions, perhaps five years rather than three. The other is to reinstate the section 73 provision to provide an automatic extension of existing planning permissions.

A relatively short implementation period may be acceptable when the market is buoyant to spur action but effectively stalls development when it is not. With an extended period, developers would be encouraged to pursue proposals during the downturn with greater likelihood that the market will recover over the lifetime of the permission.

At the same time, authorities can plan better in relation to emerging local development frameworks (LDFs) and funding packages can be established with greater certainty and less time pressure. Finally, public and private sector employment can be supported and development proposals better timed to start as soon as the market is ready.

Even straightforward consents are costly and time-consuming to obtain. The removal of section 73 means that developers must reapply from scratch once permission is lost. The delay in re-energising those schemes could slow recovery.

To support latent developments, the government should introduce a provision whereby applicants have one automatic extension of time for any permission. This would enable them to be implemented faster as the economy recovers. It would also allow local authorities to plan LDFs effectively, sustain property values and support employment. With so much infrastructure and sustainable development gain locked up in latent section 106 agreements, there are considerable community benefits to be sustained as well.

There is nothing to lose and everything to gain from keeping the development industry ticking over and able to re-engage in the market at the earliest opportunity.

*Ian Butter, head of consultancy, Rural Solutions*

**Construction: longer implementation period advocated for permissions**

## Budgetary pressure leads to decision to chop posts

With regard to the axing of staff at Bournemouth Borough Council (*Planning*, 9 January, p1) it may be helpful if I clarified the situation.

Like a number of others councils, we have received low financial settlements from government and are obliged to make annual efficiency savings of three per cent. This has been exacerbated by the fall in planning and building control income and other budgetary pressures. The previously high level of applications has reduced considerably but conversely we are dealing with the highest ever level of appeals.

To resolve our budget difficulties, vacant posts are not being filled, agency contracts are being terminated and functions are being restructured. But major cuts are still needed. We have identified areas where work can be done in a more efficient way, which will lead to three posts being declared redundant.

In the case of another post, we have determined not to provide a service and in four others fewer staff are needed to provide the level of service required. Five staff have been declared redundant on the Boscombe–Springbourne neighbourhood management initiative as funding finishes at the end of March, although some may join the economic regeneration team.

I would emphasise that no professional planners are being made redundant. We are seconding three staff to help with local development framework activities and another to help on transport work. While not wishing to minimise the impa
these changes on the staff i
the effect on the planning se
not as great as some would
We are aware of the importa
planning to the council and t
to preserve our expertise in t
*Mike Holmes, director of pla*
*and transport, Bournemout*
*Borough Council*

## Enforcement team
## appeal powers to th

Tony Monk (*Planning*, 16 Janu
makes the valid point that pl
enforcement powers are not
as strong as our communitie
A review is without doubt ove
years after the Carnwath Rep
However, in the past 12 mo
have served nearly 50 enforc
notices and had 12 successfu
prosecutions. This does not s
the picture of tame, inactive
painted by Monk.
The appeal Monk cites is al
complex than he suggests. T
notice was served against th
buildings being occupied as s
houses and the inspector sup
the Royal Borough of Windsor
Maidenhead by dismissing th
on two of them. In the third ca
decided that it had been occu
separate residential accomm
for a period after the Second
War until the 1980s and aband
had not occurred in the period
despite the following derelicti
The landowner has not gain
substantially as Monk sugges
upheld enforcement notice re
that occupation of two of the
buildings as separate houses
cease and the council will ens
this happens. The third has be
proven to the inspector's satis
as lawful and beyond enforcer
it was not given permission.
We will continue to use the t
available to us at the council a
the Environment Agency in th
inventive ways we can to secu
right outcomes for our commu
If we did not, the hard work of
planning officer colleagues wo
undermined. More recognition
difficult work of enforcement
is needed, not unwarranted cri
*Graham Stallwood, developme*
*control manager, Royal Boroug*
*Windsor and Maidenhead*

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